

On the Issues of “Loose Enrollment, Strict Graduation” and “Strict Enrollment, Loose Graduation” in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the issues of “loose enrollment, strict graduation” and “strict enrollment, loose graduation” in higher education. It assumes whether the admission of higher education should be strict enrollment or loose enrollment depends on objective conditions. Strict enrollment does not necessarily result in loose graduation and vice versa. Whether it should be “strict enrollment, loose graduation” or “loose enrollment, strict graduation” is determined by the total population and national conditions. It is not scientific to identify simply college education in our country as “strict enrollment, loose graduation”, and college education in western countries as “loose enrollment, strict graduation”. In recent years, the problems of “strict enrollment” and “loose enrollment” have been more discussed than those of “loose graduation” and “strict graduation”, which result from the lack of considering the problems comprehensively.

KEYWORD: Higher education; Loose enrollment and strict graduation; Strict enrollment and loose graduation; Examination

1 INTRODUCTION

Currently, a lot of revisions for the college entrance examination have been done by the Ministry of Education. But their attitudes are extremely cautious, because it relates to an important aspect of livelihood of people and social stability. Therefore, it is necessary to make an in-depth discussion and analysis for the current reform situation of higher education. Many scholars hold the view that China should change the system of college entrance examination and should learn from the West, that is, changing "strict enrollment, loose graduation" into "loose enrollment, strict graduation". So which form is exactly more suitable for China's condition at current stage? In this paper, the entrance requirements and graduation standards of higher education will be discussed.

2 TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF "LOOSE ENROLLMENT " AND "STRICT ENROLLMENT"

The proposal of "loose enrollment and strict graduation" originated in the 1980s (Zhao, 2009). It is generally thought that the so-called "loose enrollment" means, relatively, low entrance requirements and candidates can apply for and be easily admitted by universities without rigorous

selection examinations (Xu, 2010), which allows more people to learn and enjoy higher education resources. The admitted students may choose the major they like again in the process of learning. While "strict enrollment," now adopted in China, refers to the mode in which students must take rigorous entrance examination such as entrance examination for senior high school and for college. (Liu, 1996). So the students' number of being admitted by universities is relatively small. It can be said that these people are the elites who passed several strict selections, which is worthy of the name of "strict enrollment". Thus, the "loose enrollment" and "strict enrollment" are a basic requirement for students to meet before they are admitted by universities. Different entrance requirements will also result in different educational effects, which triggers a fierce debate in our society.

People in favor of "strict enrollment" think (Jin, 1995) that this way can guarantee the quality of the admitted students and keep good teaching order. Students are allowed to graduate once they pass the tests in universities. So, it can be concluded that "strict enrollment may result in "loose graduation." This model seeks quantity growth on the basis of the quality. It holds the view that "strict enrollment, loose graduation" is more favorable than "loose enrollment, strict graduation". It is based on the following reasons: 1. "Strict enrollment, loose graduation" is much more fair than "loose

enrollment, strict graduation". 2. "Strict enrollment, loose graduation" can cultivate talents effectively. However, people in favor of "loose enrollment" think that "loose enrollment" can firstly avoid the brain drain. On the one hand, the enrollment way will indirectly affect the direction of preliminary education. If a college can test students by different means in enrollment, admit and accept potential talents, the preliminary education will readily encourage students to attempt more things to develop their interests and potential. On the other hand, by different test patterns, it will offer the students with specialty direct chances of receiving further education, enhancing their advantages and avoiding disadvantages(Chen,1996). Thus, it is of great significance to adopt "loose enrollment" to cultivate those potential talents and also to promote social development. Secondly, "loose enrollment" can improve the overall quality of the people.(Su,2013) "Loose enrollment" can promote college education from elite education to mass one(Yang,1997). Our country needs not only first-rate scientists and leading engineers, but also first-rate skilled workers. American education adopts the mode of "loose enrollment, strict graduation". After the 1980s, the English began to learn American, opened higher education and started the implementation of "loose enrollment, strict graduation" (Zhao, 2009). All above fully demonstrates that "loose enrollment, strict graduation" can better reflects human nature.

3 OBJECTIVE FACTORS OF "LOOSE ENROLLMENT" AND "STRICT GRADUATION"

For the above arguments, the two enrollment patterns should be treated dialectically from a historical and objective perspective.

We should first figure out what is the goal of the college education in order to clarify which of these two different education modes is more suitable for China. College education is not compulsory one. Higher Education Act of People's Republic of China says that the college's mission is to cultivate senior talents to have practical and innovation ability (People's Republic of China Higher Education Act,1998.). The young people who are selected by the way of "strict enrollment" and receive higher education are reserve force of social elite. Generally speaking, they already have a good development potential to better adapt college curriculum system of high standards and strict requirements. They have a strong ability to use college resources efficiently and adapt college teaching management strongly, which can make the training course at colleges more rational, more economical and more efficient. Their professional and comprehensive quality of these

young people will be quickly improved and the quality of talent cultivation is more likely to be guaranteed through rigorous training at colleges.

Why should our country adopt the mode of "strict enrollment" for a long time? It should be viewed from the historical perspective and the objective conditions. At the early 1950s, when New China was founded just now, the whole country was very poor and had a large population and very low economic output. The state invested very small funds in education. So the money must be used in the right way .Who could receive higher education? The best fair way is admission exam. As China had a large population base, the situation would appear by gradual selection to attain the cultivating number which our higher education could bear, which resulted in "strict enrollment". Each year the population suitable for higher education in China reaches as high as 300 million. Even at present, with the increasing funds for education each year, the current scale of higher education is still relatively limited for such a large number of people. Because the number of colleges is about 2000. Even though a college recruits 10000 people every year on average, only 20 million people can receive higher education. In fact, any of the majority of colleges can only enroll an average of 3000-5000 students. So who can receive higher education in such national conditions only depends on the way of "strict enrollment". This is not the government's intention.

Of course, the ideal way is that all the youth of college age can directly enjoy the resources of higher education. In the historical development process, a rash implementation of " loose enrollment" policy not only fails to guarantee all people who apply for higher education enjoy the resources, but also greatly impact the present cultivation of senior specialized talents due to the current irrational development of population and irrational use of resource, which will also have an adverse impact on the relatively benign economic development order. Thus, it should be implemented in a good order even if the entrance threshold will be broadened. In recent years, the Ministry of Education has taken some measures to allow students with specialty to be admitted by colleges. For example, a rewarded scores may be permitted to increase additionally to the total scores of students with specialty(such as sports, art and etc), and some colleges are allowed to conduct self-enrollment. These measures are, originally, taken to allow students with specialty to study further at college, but sometimes it goes contrary to our wishes. In Renmin University of China, some people do not use it to find the students with specialty, they abuse it to seek personal gain (Zhang, 2013). It shows that at the beginning of changing mode of "strict enrollment", the relevant system has yet to be tested and perfected through practice. If "loose enrollment"

is fully implemented at this time, it may cause unexpected problems and even some extremely adverse consequences. Of course, we should not cancel the protection policies of self-enrollment and adding scores due to the causes. Because talents refer to not only the persons with overall good qualities, but also the persons with a specialty in some way. They are also the potential power of the national construction and development, and deserve fair treatment. This will directly affect our primary educational model and innovative education. But due to our current economic conditions and circumstances, the measures should be taken steadily to discover these talents. Otherwise the fair policy will generate new inequities and even affect the stability of society. Therefore, we should consider these objective factors and circumstances to decide whether we should change "strict enrollment" into "loose enrollment". To adjust from "strict enrollment" to "loose enrollment" properly can be helpful to achieve the expected goal.

In fact, many developed countries decide whether to adopt "loose enrollment" or "strict enrollment" according to their national conditions. For example, the United States does not emphasize that their college education should adopt "loose enrollment, strict graduation". A large number of colleges have been established when the economic development and economic output reach a certain scale. As long as American high school students owe a high school diploma, they can apply for college education. Based on their grades, they will be admitted by different colleges. College education is carried out based on the principle of cultivating high-level talents. This is not actually a real "loose enrollment", and it is possible to educate more people because of their strong national power. Nevertheless, not everyone can be admitted by the college with strong learning resources. Japan also adopts this way due to national power like America.

"Strict enrollment, loose graduation" has been carried out for a long time in Continental Europe, such as Germany and the United Kingdom. Because their higher education scales were relatively limited. The enrollment rate of Germany was about 18% - 20%, a little higher than that in China. It was only after the 1980s that Germany and the United Kingdom began to learn from the U.S. and open higher education. Similarly, only the top students can be admitted by famous universities.

Therefore, it is only a relative standard and determined by national objective conditions to adopt "loose enrollment" or "strict enrollment". Whatever modes we adopt should be suitable for the national condition. Although our country has made great achievements since we opened up and reformed last century, it will be very difficult to fully adopt the mode of "loose enrollment" in a long future period due to the huge amount of population. The

development environment and long period strategy which we managed to found at utmost should never be disturbed in order to pursuit so-called absolute fairness. In fact, the absolute fairness is an egalitarian ideology because fairness is relative. For a large country, stead development is very critical.

4 DISCUSSION ON "STRICT GRADUATION" AND "LOOSE GRADUATION"

The enrollment standard will directly affect the cultivation of talents and the results of college education, so the different enrollment will result in the suited graduation requirements. In this way it can achieve the goal of higher education.

Some scholars think that "strict enrollment" must surely result in "loose graduation". Is this really true? Actually, how to carry on "loose graduation" is different in different universities. Some famous science and engineering universities such as China University of Technology, Harbin Institute of Technology and Southeast University, are typical in not only "strict enrollment", but also "strict graduation". Because these are inseparable with their characteristics and social requirements: "loose graduation" cannot be done in these universities. The quality of graduation will directly affect the reputation of a university. In fact, some aspects of the so called "loose" in "strict enrollment, loose graduation" are implicit and are not a real "loose graduation". As long as they work hard a little, it is not difficult to pass the examinations at college, because they were selected from two important examinations (entrance exams for high school and college), and they have laid a good foundation for further study. But this does not mean that this is the real "loose graduation". Therefore, the proposal that "strict enrollment" equals to "loose graduation" is not always the case. "Strict enrollment, strict graduation" was carried out in China from the 1950s until the late 1980s of the last century. There is compelling evidence about study atmosphere, study attitude and study performance. The later enrollment expansion decreased the teaching quality. This also shows that when a country does not have the ability to conduct "loose enrollment", it will be bound to break the normal order of higher education and cause new inequities once this mode is implemented rigidly. When the students are admitted through the mode of "loose enrollment", their abilities are not on the same level, and will cause difficulties of class teaching (the students with poor foundation can not keep up with the teaching progress, while the students with sound foundation feel it too easy). But from another angle, if the country does not carry out the entrance examinations for high school and college, the students can be directly enrolled by colleges after they graduate

from senior high school, this is to say, all the students at the suitable age can go to college directly. However, the elimination rate of students at college will be very high (only 46% of graduates can get their degrees in America). They can not graduate after a period of study at college. It not only greatly reduces the efficiency of educational resources, but also causes great economic difficulties for student family and wastes the students a lot of time. Could such "loose enrollment, strict graduation" fit for our national condition? Thus, whether to adopt "loose graduation" or "strict graduation", it should be combined with entrance examinations for high school and college. In this sense, the enrollment for colleges is not "strict enrollment, loose graduation", but "strict enrollment, strict graduation".

Then what are the criteria of "loose graduation" and "strict graduation" on earth? In general, the course requirements for students at college must follow the teaching syllabus regulated by the Ministry of Education. We can make a comparison with other countries to find whether the requirements are higher or lower. We take a look at the Western education: Students in most countries do not need to take the entrance examinations for high school and college, and they can apply for college study after they graduate from high school. As they have no entrance exam before admission, they must have two rounds of elimination after they study at college. The first is carried out in the first year and the elimination rate is above 40%, which is quite similar to that of our entrance examination for college. The last is implemented in the third year. The graduation rate is about 50% after two eliminations. In fact, their two entrance examinations are held at colleges, but ours are held in middle school. The two entrance eliminations of colleges give us an illusion of "loose entrance and strict graduation". However, the elimination rate is just about 50% in our middle schools. Therefore, "strict graduation" that western countries implement is not so strict as we imagine, and "loose graduation" our country conducts is not really loose. "Loose graduation" and "strict graduation" are related to their national conditions.

"Loose enrollment" does not equal to "strict graduation" for students, and "strict enrollment" also does not equal to "loose graduation". There is no necessary relation. In fact, "strict enrollment" is easier to organize teaching; otherwise the extreme differences between students will greatly reduce the teaching effectiveness and the quality of cultivating

talents, which will be contrary to the original intention of higher education.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The objective factors to take the measure of "loose enrollment, strict graduation" or "strict enrollment, loose graduation" in higher education are above discussed. In fact, the enrollment threshold of college education is a relative issue. This threshold is mainly related to a country's education funds, the total economic output and population. Despite the economic output of our country is ranked the second in the world, the average GDP is not big because of the large population base and even small. We can see that we have to implement so-called "strict enrollment, loose graduation" for a long time in the future to ensure fairness in education. Only when our economic output and average GDP reach a certain scale and college education resource is adequate, can higher education in China achieve true "loose enrollment".

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